Teacher Supervision and Evaluation Policies in Selected Alberta School Jurisdictions 1983 - 1986

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Alberta Education

Alberta

87-04847/

TEACHER SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION POLICIES IN SELECTED ALBERTA SCHOOL JURISDICTIONS 1983 - 1987

A summary of Research, Opinion and Recent Experience Relative to Implementation

- by -

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under contract with

ALBERTA EDUCATION

April, 1987

The views and recommendations presented in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of Alberta Education.

FOREWORD

For several years David Townsend has been involved in research, teaching, consultation and training in teacher supervision and evaluation. During the 1983-84 school year he was chief investigator for a project that explored the Lethbridge School District's (No. 51) first year implementation of a teacher evaluation policy. In subsequent years he has conducted a number of workshops throughout the province on the supervision and evaluation of teachers and interns. Most recently, he has been a trainer and project consultant for the Medicine Hat School District No. 76 as that system has undertaken a major effort in the area of teacher supervision and evaluation. Dr. Townsend, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at The University of Lethbridge, teaches courses in Analysis of Teaching, Instructional Supervision and Teacher Evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the teacher evaluation policy was made mandatory in Alberta in January, 1985, a major concern of most school jurisdictions has been the question of implementation. An abundance of authoritative research has shown that schools and school systems are quite adept at developing written policy but much less successful at putting that policy into effective operation. This article provides an overview of the implementation process with emphases on those structures, activities, initiatives and procedures that have been seen to enhance implementation and those that may militate against success.

This article will examine how the successful implementation of new policies in school jurisdictions may be influenced by factors such as:

- the roles played by key participants in the process;
- the perceptions of professional staff with respect to the "real" purposes of any new policy, as opposed to stated purposes;
- the discrepancies that develop between stated purposes and evolving practices;
- the extent to which key participants understand how change occurs in school systems;
- the influence of constraints such as time and resources;

- the actual implementation strategies that are employed;
- and the amount and type of training that is provided.

KEY PARTICIPANTS

Who are the key participants in a school jurisdiction when teacher supervision and evaluation policies are being put into practice? First, the superintendent and other district office administrators have front line, high profile roles to play. Superintendents should make clear statements of their own commitment and their expectations for the commitment of their teachers and administrators. They should demonstrate the strength of this commitment by doing such things as attending relevant inservice education activities, presenting inservice sessions, visiting schools frequently and with purpose and being seen to be involved actively in all phases of the implementation. Through these activities, superintendents can exert a strong positive influence on evolving practice. A certain amount of risk-taking by senior district administrators is seen by teachers as contributing to greater levels of trust.

School trustees have the power to influence teacher supervision and evaluation practices. Positive support by elected officials may begin with a public acknowledgement that it takes time and costs money to ensure that good

supervision and evaluation practices are established in a school system.

It may be an act of faith for many trustees to project attitudes of trust and respect for their employees when the issue is one as politically-charged as the evaluation of professional staff. However, extensive research and emerging practice in this area have demonstrated that the attitudes of trustees can have a direct influence on staff morale and a corresponding influence on the extent to which effective practices will be established. Without the support of school trustees, the true intent of a policy may be subverted.

School-based administrators are another obvious group of key participants, perhaps the group most affected by role changes resulting from new supervision and evaluation policies. Not all school administrators are acknowledged by their staffs to be master teachers, expert in the field of teacher supervision and evaluation. However, administrators prepared to commit themselves to training and long-term professional development in supervision and evaluation are more likely to earn the trust and respect of their teachers than those who choose to do otherwise. Moreover, principals who engage in training with their teachers have been seen to exert a positive influence on their teachers' attitudes towards supervision and evaluation.

Local officers of the Alberta Teachers' Association are key participants in the implementation process at the school district level. Association leaders have the professional and ethical responsibility to encourage practices which, they believe, serve the best interests of teachers and students. The involvement of association respresentatives in all implementation stages of teacher supervision and evaluation practices has been seen to be crucial to the success of such implementations.

On every school staff there are teachers whose opinions and attitudes have extensive influence. These key teachers frequently have much to offer when new policies are being introduced. Some of them may have years of valuable experience to draw upon in aiding the implementation. Others may have special skills and knowledge, the sharing of which could be most beneficial. Some may be the moral or the political leaders on a staff. Encouraged, these teachers can be a powerful energizing force. Ignored, they have the potential to subvert the best intentions of any new policy.

When key participants perform their roles, some actions are seen to be stylistic, some symbolic, others substantive. An example of stylistic action might be a decision by a superintendent to delegate all responsibility for teacher

evaluation to school-based administrators. An example of symbolic action might be an annual gathering of all professional staff to hear motivational addresses by the superintendent and the school board chairman. An example of substantive action might be the assignment of a deputy superintendent to substitute teaching duties on days when teachers are attending inservice workshops. The various actions of key participants have a direct impact upon the perceptions of all professional staff and the perceptions of professional staff have a direct influence on what happens in individual schools.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PURPOSES, PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

The stated purposes of virtually all teacher supervision and evaluation policies in Alberta school jurisdictions are: a) to ensure that the classroom performance of teachers is reviewed on a regular basis; b) to promote the professional growth of teachers; and c) to maintain and enhance the quality of instruction being provided to students.

Most teachers are convinced that an overemphasis on the first of these stated purposes lessens the likelihood that the other two purposes will be achieved. Supervision and evaluation practices aimed primarily at the production of

written evaluation reports may encourage administrative procedures which guarantee that supervision and evaluation will not occur for purposes of professional growth, or the improvement of teaching.

When teachers perceive discrepancies between stated purposes and emerging practices, they are less inclined to make a full, professional commitment to the evaluation process. They are less inclined to take professional risks, or to trust their supervisors. Conversely, in such circumstances, teachers are more likely to adopt attitudes of compliance, without commitment. They may characterize supervision and evaluation as administrative activities "done to teachers." They may even appear to be encouraging their supervisors to "get it over with," make one or two classroom observations, write reports, but otherwise leave them alone until the next time that it must be done. In the greatest number of cases, evaluation that is so lacking in the essential component of teacher commitment is of very limited value to a school jurisdiction and of dubious utility for any but the most pedestrian administrative and bureaucratic purposes.

The willingness of teachers and administrators to commit themselves to supervision and evaluation practices

that examine thoroughly the effectiveness of teaching performance is surely a most significant factor in determining the level of professional maturity of a group of educators.

THE CHANGE PROCESS

New policies of teacher supervision and evaluation almost certainly mandate changes in existing practice. A large body of research shows that when key participants possess an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the process whereby change occurs in schools success can result for any innovation. To suggest to teachers and administrators a different way of doing something may be to imply that they have been "doing it all wrong" in the past. Successful change requires the commitment and the active involvement of all those whose work-lives will be affected by the change. Successful change occurs over time and is responsive to the needs of the people it influences. Accordingly, a good policy may well be modified and adapted as it is put into practice.

Change occurs unevenly on a school staff and in a school system. It is not productive to assume that all members of a group who have received the same training and the same knowledge and who have a shared understanding of

desired goals, will achieve those goals in similar ways. Individuals adjust to change in a variety of ways and proceed to active commitment at varying rates. Similarly, different schools have been shown to possess different "cultures." Consequently, some staff are found to be more able or willing than others to inculcate new policy into effective practice. All these factors must be considered as a system undergoes the implementation of new policy.

CHANGE AT WORK

While teachers are resentful of supervision and evaluation they perceive as being "done to them" for purely administrative or bureaucratic purposes, they are still cautious when first committing themselves to processes and practices that, over time, should enable them to participate more fully in the assessment of their own effectiveness and in making important decisions about continued professional growth. The "climate" in which initial supervision and evaluation activities occur should be one in which trust can be allowed to develop, but this may not always be possible. Very early in the process, most teachers evince a healthy skepticism toward the purposes of supervision and evaluation policies and express reservations about the extent to which any new practices can assist them in their professional development.

In such a climate misundertanding may become the normal state of affairs; communications may be scrambled; statements may be taken out of context; political position-taking may occur; teachers may feel threatened; administrators may feel inadequate; and competing "visions" may contribute to a confusion of purposes. Effective leadership is critical at this point.

As training begins, and implementation gathers momentum, an essential task for teachers and supervisors is that of learning to work effectively with each other to ensure that the very best practices are established. It is no easy matter. In any school system there is a context into which every innovation must fit, a history of relationships, successes and failures that continues to influence the work-lives of all participants. However, the implementation of a new policy of great importance gives a school jurisdiction a new opportunity to establish different, more productive relationsips among professional staff and to develop more effective strategies for success. Teacher supervision and evaluation policies are providing such an opportunity for many school systems in Alberta.

As trust develops and participants find productive ways to be involved in the changes that are occurring, teachers exhibit a strong interest in their performance and in the

performance of their colleagues. With appropriate training and coaching at this stage, teachers and supervisors can proceed quickly to skillful analysis of teaching and explorations of relationships between theory and practice relative to teaching effectiveness. Many teachers who begin the process of analyzing teaching looking mainly at what it is they do as teachers, soon progress to considerations of how well they are performing their professional duties.

In this atmosphere, teachers and supervisors can be seen to work together in most productive ways. The growth of appropriate professional relationships and the emergence of peer support groups can be observed. Teachers progress from knowing about teaching to concerns for greater effectiveness and a greater awareness of standards of professional performance. Supervisors gain invaluable experience in working with different types of teachers at different career levels. In general, this is an evolutionary process, occurring over a period of months, or even years, and eventually involving all members of the professional staff.

It is this process that enables school systems to develop standards of professional performance that are affirmed by teachers and administrators. In its most developed stages, it is the process that brings together the

three valuable elements of ongoing supervision, long-term professional development and regular review of professional performance, which should be the most desirable outcomes for all teacher supervision and evaluation policies.

TWO OTHER FACTORS - TIME AND RESOURCES

Once policy implementation begins, most teachers and administrators express some concern (at one time or another) about how much time it takes for new teacher supervision and evaluation policies to be incorporated into practice. One measure of time is the period from the conception of policy to the point at where all professional staff are seen to be engaging in the intended practices - a period that research suggests may take from three to five years. A more observable measure is the amount of time each teacher and administrator must commit, over and above existing commitments, to the learning of new skills and to the development and effective use of their skills. Yet, wherever in Alberta this process has been observed and documented, most educators have been found to be more than willing to make additional time commitments when they can be shown that their efforts are rewarded in the form of greater professional growth, increased confidence in teaching,

heightened perceptions of self-worth, recognition from colleagues and employers, and evidence of greater effectiveness in teaching. That most professional staff are so concerned with improvement is one of the most important findings to come out of recent investigations in Alberta school jurisdictions.

Effective management of the finite resources of a school jurisdiction can enhance the willingness of teachers and administrators to devote more time to their professional activities. When a new policy is accorded highest priority in a school system, the resources of the system should be marshalled to support implementation of that policy to whatever extent is necessary to ensure success. Key administrators and teachers may have to be assigned to new duties in order that their special talents can be used most effectively. Additional funds may have to be allocated for training and for substitute teachers. Policy-makers may have to look at more flexible staffing and class scheduling as teachers and administrators adopt new practices consistent with principles of ongoing professional development and on-site training. In a great many ways, the resources of a system can be used effectively by educational leaders to provide recognition, encouragement and direction

for those individuals and groups whose efforts in support of the implementation are seen as being exemplary.

AN EXAMPLE OF A TRAINING MODEL

Throughout this paper, frequent reference has been made to training. Table 1 clarifies the concept of "training" as it applies to this article.

In 1985, senior administrators in Medicine Hat School District No. 76 decided to provide training in conjunction with the implementation of new teacher supervision and evaluation policies. It was believed that teachers and supervisors seeking to develop expertise in the area of teacher supervision and evaluation should be prepared to participate in an extensive inservice education program. The program emphasized analysis of teaching, teaching effectiveness, classroom observations, clinical supervision, teacher evaluation procedures and evaluation report writing. The district administrators reasoned that this training program should be made available to all professional staff over a three-year period to demonstrate the system's commitment to a successful implementation.

Table 1 outlines the first year of the training program developed for the Medicine Hat Public School System.

TABLE 1: An Inservice Education Program for Teachers and Administrators in Medicine Hat School District No. 76, June, 1986.

Date	Groups Involved	Topics Presented
June 18, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Administrators and School Board Members	An Introduction to A Model of Teacher Supervision and Evaluation
September 25, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Administrators and Department Heads not Present in June	As above
October 8, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	(Group A) One group of 30 Administrators and Department Heads	a) An Introduction To Teacher Supervision b) Communication Skills
October 8, 1985 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	All Elementary Teachers	An Introduction to the Model of The Teacher Supervision and Evaluation

October 9, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	(Group B) A Second Group of Administrators And Department Heads	As for October 8, Group A
October 9, 1985 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	All Secondary Teachers	An Introduction to The Model of Teacher Supervision and Evaluation
October 21, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Group A	a) An Introduction To Classroom Observations b) Teaching Effectiveness Research
October 22, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	Group B	As for October 21
November 5, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	A Group of 35 Teachers (Group C) Chosen From All Schools	a) An Introduction To The Process of Teacher Supervision b) Teaching Effectiveness Research

November 5, 1985 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	A Group of 35 Teachers (Group D) Chosen From All Schools	As for morning session
November 12, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Group A	a) The Use of Videotapes In Classroom Observations And Conferences b) Developing A Climate of Trust
November 12, 1985 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Group B	As for morning session
November 21, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Group C	a) Data Collection And Classroom Observations b) Supervisory Style
November 21, 1985 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Group D	As for morning session
November 26, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Group A	Additional Data Collection And Analysis of Teaching

November 26, 1985 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Group B	As for morning session
December 5, 1985 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Group A	Demonstrations of Cycles of Teacher Supervision
December 5, 1985 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.	Group B	As Above
February 12, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups A and B	a) Review of Process Of Teacher Supervision b) Demonstration and Coaching Using Participants' Videotapes
February 12, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
February 12, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
February 13, 1986 8:30 - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for February 12
February 13, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for February 12

February 13, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for February 12
March 6, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups A and B	Exploration and Demonstration of Teaching Effectiveness
March 6, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
March 6, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
March 18, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups C and D	The Relationships Between Teaching Effectiveness And Teacher Evaluation
March 18, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for morning session
March 18, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for morning session
April 17, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups A and B	a) Analysis of Written Evaluation Reports b) Preparation of Written Evaluation Reports

April 17, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
April 17, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups A and B	As for morning session
April 18, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.	All Professional Staff of One Selected Elementary School	Relationships Between Supervision, Evaluation and Staff Development
April 29, 1986 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 Noon	Representatives of Groups C and D	Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Administrators in the Evaluation Process
April 29, 1986 1:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for morning session
April 29, 1986 4:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Representatives of Groups C and D	As for morning session

NOTE: i) Total No. Administrators involved in Training = 58
Total No. Teachers involved in Training = 72
Total No. Workshop units presented = 44

ii) Except for two one-hour sessions presented in October, all workshop sessions were designed as units with a duration of three-and-one-half hours.

iii) The implementation of teacher supervision and evaluation policies in Medicine Hat School District No. 76 will be the subject of a major, three-year research project beginning September, 1986. The project will be funded by Alberta Education Planning Services and directed by Dr. Myrna Greene, of The University of Lethbridge.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT TRAINING

Training drives implementation and is, in turn, modified by evolving practice. For example, when training sessions require participants to demonstrate on videotape their level of skill in conducting planning conferences with each other, the number of conferences occurring in any school is increased accordingly. Conversely, when participants indicate that they need more information about different ways of observing and reporting upon teacher

performance, subsequent training sessions have to be responsive to those needs.

Training sessions allow for the growth of valuable support groups for participants. Such support groups facilitate the regular exchange of ideas; the risk-taking and trust development that occurs in observation and discussion of one another's performance and experiences; the opportunity to "let off steam"; the constant motivation to keep trying to assimilate into practice the skills and knowledge acquired through training; and the chance to establish different professional relationships with colleagues in different subject areas, grade levels, schools and offices. All of these activities serve to create a certain synergy with respect to training. For a system that has regular training in place the gain may be far greater than might otherwise be anticipated from a cursory examination of the content of each separate training session.

When a strong commitment to training is modelled by all key educational leaders in a system, a much more positive stance is demonstrated by other professional staff involved. In the program outlined in Table 1, all district office administrators attended training sessions with school-based

administrators. Moreover, when teachers attended their training sessions all administrators in the system assumed responsibility for some substitute teaching. As one school board member noted, the sight of the School Superintendent taking his turn as a substitute teacher in a grade two classroom sent a very clear message of commitment throughout the system. Incidentally, many administrators commented upon a noticeable improvement in the quality of lesson plans left for substitute teachers once it became known that any number of available administrators might be performing substitute teaching duty on any given day.

A strong commitment to training made itself apparent in a different way in the Medicine Hat School District during the 1985-86 school year. After three or four half-day sessions, several participants reported to their assistant superintendent that, while they did not want to miss any of the training sessions, they were concerned about the amount of time they were spending out of their classrooms. It was decided to schedule three rather than two training sessions during workshop days so that those participants who so desired could attend an evening session or the session that required them to miss the least amount of classroom time. This compromise proved to be most satisfactory.

The first year of training prepares teachers and administrators to participate more actively in subsequent years in both the practice of supervision and evaluation and in additional training. In addition, when training is seen as an integral part of the total implementation, participants are inclined to make a more public commitment to the new practices.

The following statements are derived from the author's observations of the implementation process as it occurs in Alberta school jurisdictions when new teacher supervision and evaluation policies are introduced.

1. It always takes more time for change to occur in schools than planners allow for.
2. Attempts to hurry an implementation often produce outcomes that are antithetical to those that were intended, but necessary momentum and direction must be maintained.
3. In any school jurisdiction, there are teachers at all career levels, teachers at all "stages of concern," teachers who display diverse levels of interest in inservice education. New policy implementation should be planned to take this reality into account.

4. The implementation of new teacher supervision and evaluation policies is a task far more complex and more difficult than most school systems are prepared for. If a jurisdiction's goal is more than token implementation, it will require a long-term commitment from the great majority of its professional staff to achieve that goal.
5. The implementation of effective supervision and evaluation practices must be an inclusive rather than an exclusive process, and must be seen by professional staff as being on-going and developmental rather than finite or terminal.
6. The ability of educational leaders to trust, and to inspire trust in, their professional staff is probably the single most important factor in determining the long term success of teacher supervision and evaluation policies.
7. As most teachers become more aware of the great complexity of factors that influence the effectiveness of classroom practice, they become more concerned with the quality of their own teaching performance.

8. Just as there are levels of skill in teaching, so are there varying levels of supervisory skill. As there are stylistic differences in learning and in teaching, so are there such variations in supervisory style.
9. Educators appear to have a more pronounced need for public and professional recognition and approval than has been revealed in recent research. Some dramatic changes in teachers' perceptions about a system's purposes and about professional roles have occurred as a result of retreats, social evenings, banquets, recognition nights and other informal social gatherings supported and attended by school trustees, senior administrators and large numbers of teachers.
10. Alberta school jurisdictions are facing both a great challenge and a unique opportunity as they attempt to implement new supervision and evaluation policies. If educators permit the institutionalization of practices that neither enhance the professional development of teachers nor encourage the continued refinement and improvement of classroom practice, a great

opportunity will have been lost. However, if a process evolves that allows for open-ended professional growth and focuses attention on matters of the greatest professional importance, such a process could change forever the status of teachers and administrators in Alberta schools. The status would change from that of salaried employees to that of professional colleagues engaged in professional practice.